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RAPPORT



Atlantic Canada
Opportunities Agency



BUSINESS GOES TO COLLEGE

(and vice versa) when Nova Scotian universities establish business centres to help entrepreneurs develop their ideas. Offering sound advice and valuable learning aids, Nova Scotia's three such programs—at Université Ste. Anne, Saint Mary's University and Acadia University—bring students into the process as well, giving them the chance to work out business challenges in a real-life setting away from the classroom.

Both ways, it's good for Nova Scotians whose future is committed to the economy of the Province.

See A Tale of Three Centres, Page 6

VICE PRESIDENT'S NOTEBOOK



Wynne Potter, Vice-President
ACOA Nova Scotia

Working with the province's small and medium sized businesses for three years has been a very satisfying (and often exciting) experience for all ACOA's Nova Scotia employees. Our work has brought us in close touch with literally thousands of entrepreneurs, as well as federal and provincial departments, boards of trade, industry associations, educators, investors and others.

Certainly there had to be some belt-tightening in accordance with federal budgetary constraints. And there have been some changes in emphasis and direction along the way. After all, we were breaking new ground, developing an entirely different approach to regional development—not only in Atlantic Canada, but in the entire country. So we asked questions, responded to suggestions, and made appropriate adjustments as we went—and we continue to do so. This combination of case-work and strategic development has meant some late hours and weekend work, but I don't know anyone who feels it hasn't been worth it.

Three years later we feel very much an active player in the Nova Scotia economic scene. I believe Nova Scotians by and large accept ACOA as such. We've prepared this issue of Rapport to reflect some of the important milestones and introduce some people typical of those who have come this far with us. One of the rewards of working in an organization like ACOA is the immense variety: clients and colleagues range from large universities to food processors to small machine shops. I hope that these pages will give the reader some idea of the vitality that is generated as our Agency takes up the same entrepreneurial spirit as the small and medium sized businesses with which we work so closely.

WITH US FROM THE START

June went off with a bang as ACOA celebrated its third birthday. Since day one, it has been a flurry of activity. Up-and-running from the start, ACOA was processing

ten times the number of applications of its predecessor. It was gratifying and challenging, to put it euphemistically, to handle the overwhelming response to the Action Program. But we were certainly not alone



The original reason Hinspergers Poly Industries Limited, an Ontario-based company, came to Truro was to be close to Polymer International. Polymer makes the fabric from which Hinspergers makes tarps, swimming pool covers and other items. But proximity to their major supplier turned out to be just one of the advantages of setting up operation in Nova Scotia. According to Peter Hinspergers, things are working out tremendously well. "There is a good workforce and the things we thought would be constraints—freight, etcetera—were not a problem. In fact, we will probably expand the operation." Shown here is Plant Manager, Curtis Briggs. — Project costs: \$785,000



David Moore manages Scotia Ropes Limited, a Cape Breton subsidiary of his family's Dartmouth-based firm. It is just over two years ago that the establishment of the North Sydney plant was announced and today the rope maker is tying up its fair share of the North American market. The product, which is manufactured in a state-of-the-art facility, is made of high quality polymer fibres that are made into various sized ropes. Buyers, mostly in the fishing industry, are located in Alaska, Washington and British Columbia and, nearer to home, in New England and Atlantic Canada. — Project costs: \$2,225,000

when it came to facing challenges. Our clients were up against some of the biggest challenges of their lives, particularly those starting businesses for the first time.

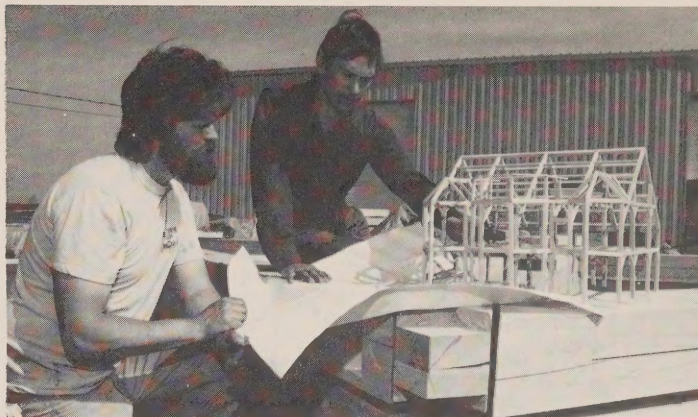
Below are photographs of some of the people who came to us during our first year to help them start a new business.



Three Halifax area women, Helene Dahl-Diggins (left), Heather Mansfield (right) and Emily Morgan (absent from photo) were among the first women to use ACOA assistance to start their business. Bedford Fashion and Bridal Studio has made costumes for Rita MacNeil which she wore at the Juno Awards and on her latest album cover. They've also made plenty of those "high collar whites"—the summer dress navy uniform shown above on Lieutenant Commander Robert Tremblay. Contracts like this have helped the company grow and, though not yet three years old, the young firm is doing well enough to add an additional two workers to the staff. — Project costs: \$11,650



Maartin Winkelman was at a wine and cheese party thrown in his honour on the last night of a trip to his native Holland, when he was struck by an inspirational thought—he would start a cheese making plant upon his return to Nova Scotia. An architect by training, Winkelman had the perseverance and positive attitude, if not exactly the perfect background, to start producing Buttercup Farm gouda and feta cheese. Today the plant supplies cheese to more than 60 stores from its operation not far from Bridgewater. Future plans include acquiring a dairy herd to supply raw material. — Project costs: \$64,300



Scotia Post and Beam Inc., a new company set up by David Spence and Daniel Reagan, is introducing Atlantic Canada to a revitalized form of construction that has become very popular in the United States. The timber beams that form the superstructure of a post and beam home are exposed on the inside so that the old-world crafting can be admired. In addition to enjoying the warmth and solid quality of these homes, those who own them can count on them lasting for 500 years or longer if well maintained. Scotia Post and Beam has sold homes and commercial structures since it began operations, and has done well enough to see the workforce it projected at 10 people, swell at times to 20. Shown above is employee Peter Buntain with Daniel Reagan. — Project costs: \$180,000



Keiver Read (shown above), Herman Juurlink and Tom Corkum are competitors when it comes to designing and installing irrigation systems. But they've found it profitable to cooperate on another front. The three men set up Scotia Plastics Incorporated in Shubenacadie, a company that manufactures the perforated irrigation pipe that all three had previously purchased from outside the province. Today they sell not only to themselves but to other drainage contractors and to building supply companies. Sales have been 15-20% better than expected and the company is looking at expanding into other related products. — Project costs: \$507,000

...some of the biggest challenges
of their lives.

ACOA HISTORY HIGHLIGHTS

OCTOBER, 1986

- ACOA announced in Speech From Throne

APRIL, 1987

- Savoie Report submitted

JUNE, 1987

- ACOA becomes operational

FEBRUARY, 1988

- Action Program established

AUGUST, 1988

- Royal Assent to Bill 103, which gave ACOA the power to implement its agenda

MAY, 1989

- Federal budget limits Action Program ceilings

JULY, 1989

- Cooperation Program launched

SEPTEMBER, 1989

- Ministerial Consultation with economic, business groups

FEBRUARY, 1990

- Action Program enhancements announced

SUPPLIER DEVELOPMENT IN ACTION

ACOA's Action Program now includes an element specifically designed to enhance the ability of small or medium sized businesses to bid and acquire public procurement contracts and sub-contracts. Under the Supplier Development Element, financial assistance may be offered for a number of activities related to increasing the competitive position of Atlantic bidders. Up to 75% of eligible costs of bid preparation will be available, and up to 50% of the costs of several other activities, ranging from licensing and certification costs to package design and technology transfer, may be obtained for qualifying projects.

BRUCE PRIME SEES THE SITES

An ACOA Payments Officer is just as likely to show up for a day's work in a scuffed pair of workboots as in highly-polished business brogues. Bruce Prime is one of the busy breed who regularly leave their desks to visit ACOA's clients. As Senior Compliance and Payments Officer working out of ACOA Nova Scotia's Halifax office, it's Prime's job to ensure that client projects are on track

and that ACOA's financial assistance is delivered accordingly. For him (and for the several contracted Payments Officers who work under him) that involves a lot of on-site visits, some of them in less than accessible places.

Prime remembers one winter day when his schedule took him to a project which the client assured him was "only a mile or so back" in the woods. "I don't know what measure he was

using," he chuckles. "By the time we got there, my leg muscles were telling me it was a lot farther than that." When Prime and the client hitched a ride back in a log-skidder, things looked better for the return trip. But not for long. "There were three of us—the client, the operator and myself jammed into that rig. A logging road is no turnpike; I must have banged my hard hat on the cab roof twenty times on the way."

But the client's project was progressing in full compliance with his contract. He got his cheque.

Even though field work can



Prime time at VideoPost. ACOA Payments Officer Bruce Prime (left) talks to VideoPost President F. Whimman Trecartin. VideoPost carried out a \$240,000 project with \$96,000 ACOA contribution and interest buydown.

translate into frequent 14-hour days for Bruce Prime, it's an essential part of the job. As he puts it, "We have responsibilities, and so have they. If a project is meeting its critical path, we want to make sure that our payments are right on schedule, too. If there's a problem on the client end, we want to know what and why, so

ACOA is a risk-sharing organization, and the Payments Officer gets a real, front-line sense of the excitement involved in entrepreneurship. The Account Manager is there when the seed is planted, but we're the ones who get to watch the crop come in."

The experiences of Prime and his colleagues could make up a

Bruce Prime, whether he's dodging sparks in a welding shop or getting dusted with flour in a specialty bakery, is always close to what the Action Program is all about. And loving it, every country mile of the way.

"You have to know enough about every client's enterprise to talk the language and understand the peculiarities of the business."

we can help get things back in order if at all possible."

Bruce Prime may be busy—but bored? "Never," he responds quickly. "There can't be many jobs where you may be looking at a fashion designer's sketches one day and bumping into sides of beef in a cold storage room the next. And you have to know enough about every client's enterprise to talk the language and understand the peculiarities of the business.

fascinating picture of the sort of ACOA-supported activity that's going on in every corner of the region. "Entrepreneurs are fascinating people," he stresses. "They're action-oriented. We make every effort to turn a payment around at top speed, and we usually get it in the works within a week or so of a submission. But there are those who suggest (jokingly—I think) that we should make out a cheque before we leave their premises."

A NEW DIRECTOR FOR ENTERPRISE CAPE BRETON



Brian Cook, ECB's new Director: "We're here first and foremost to serve our clients..."

Brian Cook, Enterprise Cape Breton's new director, brings a great deal of experience to his new position. The Yarmouth native spent the first 24 years of his career in the Royal Canadian Air Force and Canadian Forces, the last ten years of which were in construction engineering. In 1981, he became the Regional Director of the Conservation and Renewable Energy Office at Energy, Mines and Resources Canada in Halifax. There he oversaw a variety of programs, including those which provided

financial contributions to industrial and commercial organizations for energy conservation work. These projects were similar to those undertaken by ECB.

Cook firmly believes in client service: "We're here first and foremost to serve our clients in the most efficient and effective way," he says. "I've spent the last 20 years managing public money, people and projects, and that's the strength I bring to this job."

A TALE OF THREE CENTRES

What's a nice university like St. Mary's doing among the businesslike boulevards of Dartmouth's Burnside Industrial Park? Business, what else! St. Mary's is one of three Nova Scotian universities which have established small business development centres with the direct support of the ACOA Action Program. The others are Université Ste. Anne in Church Point, and Wolfville's Acadia University.

Providing financial support is an important and well publicized ACOA activity. But businesses often need advice as much as money. In the case of the three university business centres, ACOA has helped universities bring start-up information and counsel to many. Among the three, they've tallied an impressive total of over 500 cases, and momentum is growing.

There's a bonus in all this for business students—under the close supervision of the centre's professional staff, they often get to do hands-on tasks like helping develop business plans and assisting with market research. As one business professor-client says, "There's nothing 'ivory-tower' about business studies—at least there shouldn't be. And these centres provide valuable field work for the students as well as front-line consulting services for small businesses in the immediate area of the centres. It's a two-way win."

Gerald Comeau, who until his recent appointment to the Senate was Director of the Jodrey Centre for Business Development (Centre Jodrey pour développement d'entreprises) at Université Ste. Anne, endorses that view with enthusiasm. "It is part of our university mandate to respond to the needs of social, cultural



St. Mary's is one of three mainland Nova Scotian universities which have established small business development centres with the direct support of the ACOA Action Program.

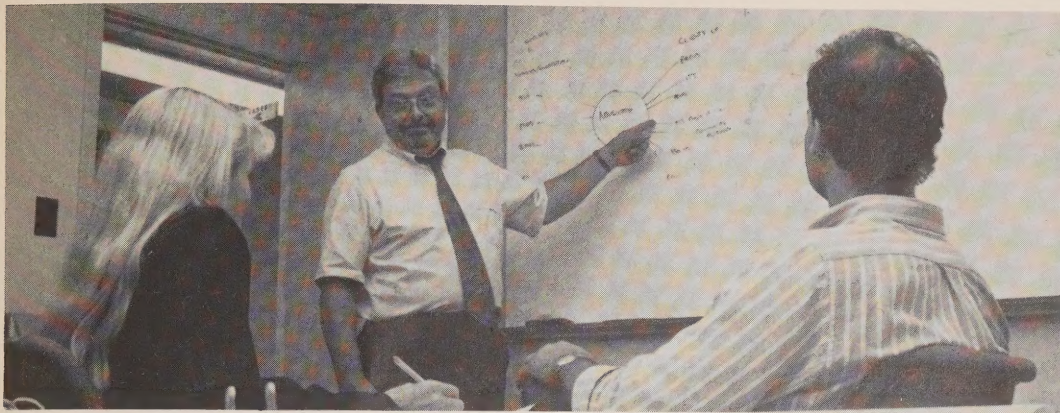
and economic development of the Acadian regions of Nova Scotia, and it's the economic one I hung my hat on in setting up the Centre," he says. "We don't work for anybody," says Comeau, "but we work with anyone, inexperienced or established, who is serious about an entrepreneurial project. We have the resources to show them how to get the job done, and we stick with them every step of the way."

The Jodrey Centre believes in accessibility and partnership. Several business development organizations, including Growth Opportunities of Digby County and the Nova Scotia Department of Small Business, maintain offices at the Centre which are open and staffed two days or more per week. The Clare Chamber of Commerce

"We don't work for anybody but with anyone, inexperienced or established, who is serious about an entrepreneurial project."



Centre Jodrey at Université Ste. Anne has become a strong resource area for entrepreneurs.



The business centre at Acadia provides 'ground level' assistance to business clients.

meets there. A business library and a board room are in frequent use, and "there's a constant flow of local business people in and out the door," says Gerald Comeau.

David Meisner, who heads up the Business Centre on the Acadia University campus,

Meisner points out that the Acadia Business Centre is not there to replace or compete with private sector consultants, but to offer counsel, at a nominal fee, for those who would not otherwise have access to starting-level help. Like his colleagues, he hopes that in time business centres throughout the region can be tied together in a network that offers the assistance available at any one centre to all Atlantic entrepreneurs. "We're individually making great strides," he says, "but together we could be a major force for every corner of the Atlantic economy."

John Hiltz is the Director of the Saint Mary's University Business Development Centre. It's 'campus' in Burnside is the largest concentration of businesses east of Montreal, and John says that's a big help in imparting to SMU business students a sense of what the real world of business is all about. "They get to experience situations involving urgent action that can't be handled at the philosophical, classroom level," he says. Don Aker, who put in time at the Centre on the way to gaining his Bachelor of Commerce degree at SMU, agrees. "It's a very useful thing," he says, "to get that orientation—to see what you're really going to be doing when you graduate. The contact with

local business is invaluable."

"Of course, it works the other way, too," adds Hiltz. "We offer several credit classes to business people right here within easy reach of their firms."

The Saint Mary's Business Centre, in handling more than 250 cases in under 18 months of operation, has assisted businesses as diverse as an environmentally friendly diaper service and a line of fashionable clothing for larger women. Fred Entwistle's small business is typical of cases handled by all three of Nova Scotia's university business centres. Entwistle, a millwright and electronics technician, began with nothing more than what he recalls as "a couple of ideas running around in my mind—but I didn't really know what to do with them. So I took the opportunity to go to the Saint Mary's Business Centre just to talk things over." He found answers to his questions and help in initiating a business plan and market study. He used the videos and business texts available to clients. And he had the opportunity to engage in discussion groups with other clients, exchanging ideas and comparing notes. Fred Entwistle's equipment service and repair business is starting to grow nicely, but he still keeps in touch with the Centre for advice and encouragement. "People like me, who want to get into

business for ourselves, really need some help getting the answers," he says.

Other university-ACOA relationships have been established in Nova Scotia. At St. Francis Xavier, for instance, an ACOA contribution helped establish a dairy laboratory. Under the direction of Professor David Pink it is dedicated to finding technical improvements and developing new products for the province's dairy industry. At the Dalhousie School of Business in Halifax, Professor Dorothy Riddle, one of the world's leading academic specialists in trade, leads senior students in trade-related projects for independent business.

But in terms of grass-roots inquiries and start-up and development assistance, it's the three business centres at Ste. Anne, Acadia and Saint Mary's which have the most immediate bearing on the individual small businesses of their surrounding areas. Gordon DeWolf, ACOA Nova Scotia's Director General for Economic Development, likes to think of their activities as "ground level assistance—more accessible, less formal and more likely to be based on personal knowledge of the client and his or her community identity than most sources of assistance."

What's the next step? Directors of all three university business centres in Nova Scotia are keen to see two things: increasing cooperation and information-sharing among the facilities; and further growth of the concept involving other universities.

With the impressive initial successes of the university business centres, it looks as though entrepreneurship has come to Nova Scotia campuses to stay.

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believes strongly that the concept goes right to the heart of economic development. "Business Centres get totally away from the idea of grants and look instead at the ways in which we can get entrepreneurs off the ground in a realistic, self-sustaining way," he says. "Financial planning, business plans, marketing plans: these are the things that make the difference between what is merely a seemingly good idea and a truly viable new business."

NEW YARMOUTH OFFICE —UP AND RUNNING



Barbara Hubbard, General Manager, Yarmouth Regional Business Development Corporation, and Tony Cormier, Account Manager outside ACOA Yarmouth Office.

ACOA has established an office in Yarmouth in order to enhance the agency's service to the Southwestern Nova Scotia client base. Project Manager Bill Smith, who set up the new operation, is enthusiastic about the initiative. "We believe we've found ourselves a very effective 'fit' in the business development scene of Southwestern Nova Scotia," he says. "Cooperation is essential to ACOA's mandate, and we're very strong on developing partnerships with the provincial business development people, the regional business associations and anyone else whose mission interlocks with ours. We won't be a stand-alone operation."

In fact, the ACOA offices are located in the same suite as that occupied by the Yarmouth Business Development Corporation, and Tony Cormier, Account Manager at the Yarmouth ACOA office, says the arrangement is a handy one. "We have an excellent relationship with the YBDC and our provincial colleagues at the Small Business Service Centre, and we've established good

links in Shelburne and Digby Counties as well," he says. "We're also starting to work closely with the Jodrey Centre around the shore at Church Point. We haven't placed any real limits on where we'll be operating or with whom. One thing's for sure—the response from the Southwestern Nova Scotia business community has been encouraging. We hit the ground running, and we're already involved in several very promising projects that we expect will benefit the business climate in the area."

A few short blocks away from the new ACOA location is the loading dock where car ferries begin and end their voyages to Bar Harbour and Portland. To Tony Cormier that's a reminder of the opportunities that exist a few hours' steam across the Gulf of Maine. "Especially since the advent of Free Trade," he points out, "Southwestern Nova Scotia is really well positioned to get more aggressive about going after American markets. We feel that we'll gain a lot in efficiency and prompt client service by having an office at that end of the province."

VENTURING FORTH

ACOA staff and board members have been meeting Nova Scotians in Mabou, Shelburne, Church Point and 31 other locations throughout the Province. In a "road show" that began in mid-April and continued until mid-June, the agency held public information sessions for community leaders and business people. According to organizer Winifred Desjardins, the information flowed both ways. "We were out there to answer questions," she reports, "but we wanted to hear what people are thinking about the Agency as well—fully and frankly."

Discussion was indeed lively. "Marketing assistance, eligibility, turn-around time, levels of support, market studies, trade shows, patent searches—we heard the full gamut of questions and comments," says Desjardins.

Genuine interest outweighed criticism, but there was pointed feedback concerning some issues—particularly during the 17 special sessions with representatives of business organizations. "We held private sessions for small business groups, chambers of commerce and boards of trade," Desjardins says. "Their people spoke with ACOA account managers, program managers and, in some cases, board members. There

were some tough questions always fair. It was a very valuable form of feedback. One thing we learned is that business wants even more ACOA presence within communities."

Changes to the Action Program and their significance to small and medium sized business in Nova Scotia came in for particular attention. There was high interest in two new elements of the Program—Supplier Development and Marketing Development—and subsequent take-up, particularly of the marketing element, has been very good.

"After all that time on the road I don't think any of us has room for another roadside doughnut," smiles Winifred Desjardins. "And we discovered at one stop that it's not too easy to get a tray of slides out of a car when you've locked the keys inside. But we managed, and the show went on." More seriously, she adds, "The exercise gave us a greater appreciation of what Nova Scotia business wants and needs. What we learned will be put to good use, so stay tuned for more information on ACOA in the community."

RAPPORT is a publication of ACOA Nova Scotia and Enterprise Cape Breton.

FEEDBACK

Please send your comments and suggestions to the Editor of RAPPORT, Communications Branch ACOA Nova Scotia

P.O. Box 2284, Station "M" Suite 600, 1801 Hollis St. Halifax, N.S., B3J 3C8 or call us at (902) 426-9305/3470



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